

## Seeing God's Hand in Hardship, Part 2 - Acts 28:3 – September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2010

- Today's teaching is part two of a series I've titled; "Seeing God's Hand in Hardship."
- The reason for this- is because we see this, in all that the Apostle Paul has gone through and is yet to go through on the Island of Malta.
- In other words, even in the midst of unspeakable difficulty and hardship, we are still able to see the hand of God at work in Paul's life.
- Having said that, I will say this; "often times when we're in the midst of a trial, it's not always easy to recognize the hand of God in it."
- That's where the beloved Apostle comes in as he rises from the pages of scripture to teach us how to see God's hand in our trials.
- The reason I say this is because the narrative in this chapter demonstrates that Paul knows this - by virtue of what he does with this.
- Woven into the fabric of our text we can make several observations, from which we can see the hand of God in those difficult situations.
- We looked at the first one in verse one when they finally reach land where it's still raining and cold as their battle for survival continues.

### 1. Refuge (Verse 1)

- Here, we saw that God's hand came by way of refuge as they land on the island of Malta, (Refuge), which they didn't recognize at first.

### 2. Kindness (Verse 2)

- The second way that we can see God's hand in our hardship was in verse two. It's when we're the recipients of "unusual kindness."
- Were told that it's cold and raining, so the Barbarian's show unusual kindness by building a fire for them, and are welcoming to them.

### 3. Strength (Verse 3a)

3a Paul gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire...

- The third way that we can discover God's hand in our hardship is found in the first part of verse three. It's in His supernatural strength.
- v3a Remarkably, Paul himself gathers a pile of brushwood and puts it on the fire, doubtless to keep it going so that it doesn't go out.
- This is astounding to me for a number of reasons not the least of which is that he's as tired, fatigued, and exhausted as everyone else.
- I would suggest that, in what would be deemed unspeakable weakness physically, we see God's hand giving strength supernaturally.
- Often times, while in the midst of difficulty and hardship, when we're so weak, tired, and even downcast, God is able to strengthen us.
- I see this as God moving His mighty hand in our lives as if to leave His fingerprints on our situation to let us know that He's still with us.

Charles Spurgeon - "God never gives strong faith without fiery trial; He will not build a strong ship without subjecting it to very mighty storms; He will not make you a mighty warrior if He does not intend to try your skill in battle. The sword of the Lord must be used; the blades of heaven must be smitten against the armor of the evil one, and yet they shall not break, for they are of true Jerusalem metal which shall never snap. We shall conquer, if we begin the battle in the right way. If we have sharpened our swords on the Cross, we have nothing whatever to fear; for though we may be sometimes cast down and discomfited, we shall assuredly at last put to flight all our adversaries, for we are the sons of God even now. Why, then, should we fear? Who shall bid us "stay" if God bid us advance?"

- Another reason this is so remarkable is that this is "the" Apostle Paul and not the crew from the ship who should be the ones doing this.
- Listen, if I'm Paul, I'm not taking it upon myself to gather wood, I'm yelling at everyone else to get up and get wood so I can get warm!
- If the truth be known, every single one of these 276 men owed their very lives to the Apostle. Had it not been for him, they'd have died.
- The least these men could do is show some respect and gratitude by stopping Paul from getting the wood and just get it themselves.

Charles Spurgeon – "He was not too proud to gather sticks, nor should the most eminent Christian think any work beneath him by which he may minister to the comfort of others."

- I'll take it a step further than Spurgeon and say that it was the hand of God that gave him not only the strength to, but the only one to.
- Conspicuously absent from Luke's account is that there was not even one other man that got up to help Paul gather wood for the fire.
- I would suggest that this was God's hand - through Paul's helping hand - because a snake is about to fasten itself to only Paul's hand.

### 4. Opportunity (Verse 3b)

3b ... a viper, driven out by the heat, fastened itself on his hand.

- It's this that brings us to the fourth way we discover God's hand in our hardship. It comes in the form of a divinely appointed opportunity.
- v3b There just so happens to be a snake that was driven out from the heat of the fire Paul was stoking, and it fastens itself on his hand.
- This is why I believe it was the hand of God leading the hand of Paul to get wood and place it on the fire and it's why nobody else helps.
- If the snake would have bitten anyone else, it would have not presented the same opportunity for God to reveal Himself in their midst.

Charles Spurgeon – "It seemed strange that there should be but one viper, and that it should fasten upon the apostle's hand; serpent-bites will wound the most benevolent and the holy hands."

- The holy hand of God is allowing this viper to fasten itself to the hand of Paul, because it becomes for Paul, an optimal opportunity.
- As we'll see in the next verse, this divine opportunity will come vis-à-vis the poisonous venom having "no ill effects," on the Apostle.
- Be that as it may, The Apostle Paul will use this opportunity to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to these local Barbarian Islanders.
- Perhaps the lesson is that God's hand comes in this way because it's God's way of presenting us an opportunity to present the gospel.

I think Jon Coursen said it best when in his commentary he wrote: "Paul, ...would use this opportunity to share the gospel with these people in a uniquely powerful way. You see, the fallacy of the overemphasis of the faith movement—the mentality that says we should never be smitten by snakes—is that it robs us of opportunities to share the gospel. The Maltese people knew about these snakes. They had watched their families and loved ones succumb to their poison. Now they were about to see how Paul would handle the power, the danger, the pain of their venom. So, too, the Lord will allow you to go through difficulties. The doctor may say, "It's inoperable." And no matter how you name it and claim it, folks, it may be the Lord's plan for you to navigate that pain and venom in such a way that the barbarians around you, who are also losing their loved ones to cancer, will change their minds about who God is as a result. Jesus didn't say to Thomas, 'Watch this miracle or listen to this sermon.' He said, 'Touch My wounds.' The world is rarely impacted and drawn to Jesus Christ through the sight of Christians prospering. No, it's through seeing believers suffering and not giving up that the barbarians change their minds. Perhaps the most important ministry you'll ever have is when people see how you react to the pain they go through all of the time. Difficulty is the agent that often allows people an opportunity to see the reality of Jesus Christ most clearly."

- Let me close this way and say; "God's hand may be in your hardship to present an opportunity for others to see Jesus more clearly."